

MEMO

To: Pedro Ramos, Superintendent, Big Cypress National Preserve (BICY)

From: Big Cypress Off-Road Vehicle Advisory Committee (ORVAC)

Re: Recommendation for Implementation of the Stairsteps Unit ORV Trail System

Date: April 9, 2013

At its January 30, 2013 meeting, the ORVAC concluded a lengthy round of discussions related to recommendations for further implementation of the ORV trail system in the Stairsteps unit of Big Cypress National Preserve. These discussions were informed by the thoughtful work by the BICY ORVAC Corn Dance/Stairsteps Subcommittee. Through these discussions we developed the following recommendations for your consideration, with the understanding that, as always, your staff will be assessing the viability of these recommendations through careful ground-truthing. We look forward to hearing your thoughts.

The ORVAC recommends the following policies and practices:

- There should be connectivity between Stairsteps Zone 3 and Stairsteps Zone 4 for vehicles permitted in those units.
- Given this connectivity, all trails in Stairsteps Zone 3 should be open to whatever type of vehicle is permitted in the unit. This should be managed by operator discretion dictating the type of vehicle appropriate for the conditions.
- We should not designate trails for use only by wheeled ORVs or only by airboats.
- The portion of Stairsteps Zone 4 that was closed due to proposed designation of critical habitat for Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow (CSSS) should be evaluated for reopening through adaptive management, in light of USFWS having rejected critical habitat designation. This evaluation should take place using all available policy and science, including existing and new science, if needed.
- With adaptive management in place, the Sig Walker access site should be open to both wheeled vehicles and airboats.
- In the Paces Dike area, there should be no north/south primary trail on the east side, and all east/west segments should be designated as primary with short secondary trails to the areas known as Doc Wolf and Green Head.
- In Stair Steps Zone 2, after having provided desired destinations, staff should determine the shortest route that meets the agency's criteria.
- The ORVAC has no objections to NPS moving forward with the request by the Everglades Conservation and Sportsman's Club (ECSC) to reopen access for their membership to the gated culvert crossing immediately across Loop Road from their club grounds, should NPS choose to do this.
- The ORVAC recommends adoption of the Stairsteps Zone 4 map as presented by the subcommittee (attached).
- The ORVAC recommends adoption of the primary trails of the Stairsteps Zone 3 map as presented by the subcommittee (attached), and secondary trails to Doc Wolf and Green Head destinations, as noted above.

- The ORVAC recommends adoption of the primary trails shown on the Stairsteps Zone 2 map, as presented by the subcommittee (attached), and the secondary trail to New River.

The ORVAC requests that BICY staff provide more information about why the original ORV Management Plan does not allow secondary trails in Stairsteps Zone 4, or set a mileage limit on primary trails for that unit. Following receipt of this information, the ORVAC will consider whether we feel it is appropriate to recommend allowing secondary trails in this zone through adaptive management.